Hysteria meets the art of Francois Koch

Gallery Guide

RICHARD CHEALES

HAVING originally been a bare-foot boy from the backveld, I was intrigued by Francois Koch's carefully observed lowveld vistas in oils at the Lister Art Gallery.

Koch catches the atmosphere of sandy soil, sunscorched grass and twisted thorn trees with a clinical touch and acid-sharp colours.

Mrs Sefton, who manages the gallery, says there was a form of art hysteria at Koch's opening. People were offering buyers of Koch's work hundreds more rands to sell the work to them.

The 29-year-old artist, born and educated in Johannesburg — with a spell here at art school — has already blazed a trail of success in Pretoria.

People are betting he will end up exhibiting in New York like his older brother Martin. Martin paints similar scenes and has become well known in Pretoria (and New York) for his animal studies.

As my bare-foot days were almost half a century ago, the raggedy aloes that always seemed somewhere around in the arid areas Koch depicts so studiously might have been wiped out by drought.

If not, and Koch starts painting them, I'm charging R1 commission on every future picture he does featuring aloes. With so much talk about his splendid future, I might end up a little richer. . . .

ONE of the finest watercolour shows seen here is that by the British artist, John Knapp-Fisher — who has sold paintings to British Royalty — at Triad Gallery.

With his South African-born wife, Knapp-Fisher travelled by train through the Cape and Karoo (before the floods) for about six weeks. The result of his painting train trip is a series of superbly executed and charming vignettes.

When first he exhibited in Johannesburg four years ago, he become friendly with Mr Harold Jeppe.

This technically superlative exhibition is one that Mr Jeppe "invited" Knapp-Fisher to hold. It reminds me of many shows of the past, outstanding in their way, that Harold Jeppe arranged.

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IT is an honour for Johannesburg artist Tadeus Jaroszynski to share an exhibition with Sebastian Matta — considered by some to be the world's most important living artist — and Gianni Dova, a famous Italian artist who has participated in prestige world exhibitions by invitation.

This unusual, Surrealism-flavoured exhibition is at the Lidchi Art Gallery. Both international artists, older than 40-year-old Jaroszynski, would be impressed by his work that has such startling individuality.

His Surrealistic approach evolves into vivid colour fantasies that simultaneously are ghoulish, gentle, sensitive and dynamic.

Dova can be said to soar into the sky with imaginative graphics concerned with flying, floating objects. Matta's graphics show a highly virile mind that in the end seems to see all human shapes as sex organs.

If Aunt Adelaide saw a section of his smallest works, she wouldn't bother with the vapours but would drop in a faint.

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FOR the second time in four years exhibiting her gentle oil paintings in her husband's garden study, Una Gillespie says the length of her show — at 31 Cecil Avenue, Melrose — depends how much longer her husband's patience lasts.

Some portraits and flower studies, evolved with commendable simplicity, illustrate how much further this sensitive lady could go if she had more time to devote to painting.

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THE artist from Cape Town, James Thackwray, is a direct descendent of the Thackwray who was the first member of the Legislative Assembly for Grahamstown, in the early Cape Colony.

James Thackwray studied fine art at Michaelis School of Art, was a layout artist for a leading Cape Town newspaper, and then ran a private art school for two years.

His approach in his oils on view at Gallery 101, Small Gallery, is slightly like that of Johannes Meintjes. But Thackwray presents the Coloureds in a gentler, more dreamy way.

His work is not known in Johannesburg, but people interested in this style of painting would well be advised to see his pictures, so sincerely painted and having much charm and dignity.

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

Art Gallery: Three Centuries of French Art, a visiting collection valued at R4-million.

Association of Arts, Main Gallery, Carlton Hotel: Work by 10 lecturers from the Johannesburg College of Art.

Balalaika Hotel, Sandown: Watercolours by Gail van Lingen.

Boys' Town Gallery, Craig Park Centre: Lore Glowacki paintings.

Elizabeth Art Gallery, 3 Savoy Centre, Aintree Avenue: "Favourite Signatures" exhibition.

Gallery 101, Rand Central: Orde Levinson presents work by British artist Patrick Procktor. Also, in Small Gallery, paintings by Cape Town artist James Thackwray.

Goodman Gallery, Hyde Park: New paintings by Bill Hart. Also "naif" paintings by Rosemary Cloete.

Lister Art Gallery: Oil paintings by Francois Koch.

Lidchi Art Gallery: Dova, Jaroszynski and Matta paintings and graphics.

Madden Galleries, Sandton City: Work by nine leading international artists.

Nordene Gallery, 112 Central Avenue, Atholl: British artist Rodney Gladwell exhibits.

Pieter Wenning Gallery: South African and overseas artists.

Triad Gallery, Carlton Centre: Watercolours by British artist John Knapp-Fisher.

Village Gallery, Sandton City: Paintings by Eric Pithey.

31 Cecil Avenue, Melrose: Paintings by Una Gillespie.

Nedbank Gallery, Killarney: Watercolours by Robert Haber.

COMING EXHIBITIONS

Upstairs Gallery, Oslo Chambers: From April 2, work by three women artists — Iris Fitgerald, Molly Webster and Ivy Botha.

Goldman Gallery, 18 1st Street East, Fairwood: Sculpture and paintings by Leslie Goldman. From March 30 to April 15.